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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002455

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/25/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: KURDISH PUK RESPONDING TO CALLS FOR REFORM

REF: A. BAGHDAD 002334  
[B](#). BAGHDAD 001580

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: According to a close member of Iraqi President Talabani's staff, Talabani and his deputy Kosrat Rasoul are committed to reforming the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and are taking steps to ensure that this process is well underway before the next party congress. The staffer also commented on Talabani's delicate health. We sense a recognition among senior PUK officials of the need for reform, but we do not expect giant strides towards major reform. END SUMMARY.

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Talabani prepared to make changes in the Politburo  
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[2](#). (C) Aram Yarwaessi (strictly protect), a member of President and PUK leader Jalal Talabani's personal staff known as the secretariat, told Poloff that Talabani and PUK deputy secretary general Kosrat Rasoul are interested in altering the composition of the PUK politburo to better reflect political realities in Sulaymaniyah, though he stopped short of suggesting a radical facelift was in store. Talabani is cognizant of discontent within the KRG over the lack of services and corruption, as well as the disenchantment of Kurdish youth, he said. He said one of the reasons Talabani had returned early from his trip to the U.S. in late May-early June is that he needed to address the problems in the party and prepare for the upcoming party congress (the conference date is still uncertain, some contacts have said October or November 2007, others January 2008). He said the PUK Politburo came to Baghdad shortly before Talabani left for China in June so that Talabani could give each of them an assignment in preparation for the congress. Each member now has responsibilities including scheduling conferences; establishing committees; and holding meetings to discuss reforms, recruitment, and how to advance the party's interests.

[3](#). (C) Both Talabani and Rasoul indicated to Yarwaessi that

he was under consideration to fill a slot on the politburo that they planned to designate to a younger party member. If it happens, this would be a concession to the younger generation - showing them that there is a future for them in the party and that their views are valued. Younger party members and potential recruits have been concerned about the ability to advance in the party and have felt their views neglected. Yarwaessi said he had been selected to head what he called the largest youth organization in Kurdistan and was considering taking some time away from his duties with Talabani to pursue this. He suggested that that this move would serve two purposes: helping the PUK reach out to the youth and providing him with a base of support and credibility in the eyes of the old guard PUK.

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Rasoul Gets It Too  
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¶4. (C) Yarwaessi said he and Rasoul discussed several issues on the plane to the Mayo Clinic, including how to combat the growing drug problem in the Kurdistan region and how to pull in the youth to the party. Rasoul displayed a frank recognition of the problems facing the PUK and

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emphasized the PUK leadership's commitment to reform.

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Talabani's Health  
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¶5. (C) Yarwaessi claimed that the injections Talabani received for his knees had greatly decreased his pain and increased his mobility. According to Yarwaessi, Talabani would have to repeat the injections every six months. He admitted that Talabani's health remained delicate, noting that he had "the flu" at Embassy's July 4 reception and is often tired.

¶6. (C) Comment: Other contacts (ref A) as well as press reporting have corroborated some reform efforts. At the same time, the two major Kurdish parties (PUK and KDP) are taking steps to preserve their power, including agreeing to cooperate in the next elections and forming a strategic alliance in the face of public dissatisfaction and rising Islamist sentiment. Thus, we do not expect giant strides towards reform of the PUK or the KRG government.

CROCKER